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The Opposition Movement in Poland

The opposition movement in Poland has undergone dramatic change since 1980-81 when Solidarity -- with the support of the majority of the Polish people -- was on the threshold of changing the Polish political system. Solidarity as a centrally controlled mass organization no longer exists, but the spirit and ideals that it represented are very much alive. A resentful society has developed a number of social and political activities outside of government control plus a small underground network that is the core of anti-regime activity. []

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The Polish "underground" is composed of several hundred illegal opposition groups that vary in size, sophistication and activity. The largest is Solidarity and many of the others are loosely associated with it, but some are hostile to the former union. Their goals and strategy vary and even Solidarity is badly fragmented and hampered by communication problems now that it has been driven underground. All of these organizations, however, have one unifying element -- their opposition to the Polish Communist regime. []

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Recent publicity on the arrest of key Underground Solidarity leader, Zbigniew Bujak, and the underground's continued inability to organize nationwide, large-scale protests gives the impression that the opposition movement is collapsing. We believe, however, that the underground remains a key locus for opposition to the regime. Underground activists produce a flood of books and periodicals that influence the thinking of millions of readers. Unlike other East European dissident movements, the Polish

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underground has ties to the workers -- through
educational programs and factory level organizing --
that make it a force to be feared by the authorities.

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Solidarity

Underground Solidarity has a nationwide three-tiered structure. Its national leadership, the 5-7 member Temporary Coordinating Commission (TKK) shares the national limelight with Lech Walesa and the remnants of the Solidarity leadership that existed when the union was legal. Walesa has increasingly become a symbol and it is the TKK that now sets Underground Solidarity's general policies and guidelines for action. It is supported by a staff of 70-100 people divided into cells which coordinate relations between TKK members and the rest of the underground, provide logistical support and information, and produce the most important underground newspaper, Tygodnik Mazowsze. Parallel to the TKK is the Committee for Education, Culture, Science and Health (OKNO) which carries on increasingly important educational and cultural activities. OKNO, currently funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy, was formerly subservient to and financed by the TKK, but both bodies agreed this spring that OKNO would be independent. [redacted]

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The second tier consists of approximately 24 regional executive commissions which decide how to implement the national directives of the TKK, coordinate the movement's activities among the factories in their regions, and represent their constituents before the TKK. Hundreds of factory committees established since the imposition of martial law in December 1981 constitute the lowest tier. They support Underground Solidarity by paying dues and by participating in anti-regime activities as well as the movement's educational and cultural activities. A Solidarity Coordination Bureau representing the union abroad was established in July 1982 and is headquartered in Brussels. [redacted]

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Underground Solidarity, in our estimation, is growing more and more fragmented. According to a US Embassy officer who monitored the underground, the TKK's influence is limited only to the biggest industrial enterprises in larger cities. [redacted]

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[redacted] in mid-1984, the TKK did not exert direct control over his regional commission. The recent arrest of Zbigniew Bujak, the most important and best known TKK leader, will likely accelerate the TKK's decline as a national leadership body. His absence will make the regional and local bodies more inclined to direct their own affairs. [redacted]

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Troubles also exist at the regional level. [redacted]

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[redacted] in the highly industrialized Silesian region, the factory committees paid little attention to the authority of the regional commission. An extensive report on the underground in Silesia prepared by our Consulate in Krakow provides many insights into the divisions and distrust that exist in Solidarity organizations in this industrial and mining region. Some of these groups are suspected of having been penetrated by the secret police. Others disagree on tactics and attack each other in underground publications. Relations are so poor that some accuse others of being "agents of Moscow." [redacted]

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This muddled picture is equally confusing to the national leadership. [redacted] there is little hard information on the size, strength or activities of Solidarity groups in the factories. Active leadership at the factory level is fading and in some areas no longer exists and there is no coordination of activities between factories in a region. [redacted] no new leaders are willing to step forward and run the risk of arrest to revitalize a clandestine union structure. [redacted]

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Underground Solidarity clearly is not the mass movement of more than nine million members that existed before the imposition of martial law. Current estimates of membership by Solidarity and Western observers, based on those who pay union dues range as high as six million, but we suspect this figure is inflated. For example, some underground publications are now being sold instead of financed by union dues and distributed free -- possibly an indication that dues paying members have declined. [redacted]

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[redacted] sympathy for the union and the underground is widespread. Solidarity officials estimate that twenty-seven percent, or seven million people of the voting age population, heeded Solidarity's call for a boycott of last

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year's parliamentary election, despite the implied threats of regime retribution. Even the government's polling results show that five and a half million voters bypassed the ballot box. []

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The Other Underground

Serious competitors to Underground Solidarity are few and only two can claim developed structures and wide membership. "Fighting Solidarity" split from the parent organization in June 1982 because it rejected Solidarity's willingness to compromise with the regime. Late last year, it claimed to have several hundred active members nationwide -- probably an accurate figure given its ambitious and widespread publishing program: []

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[] . The Committee for Social Self Defense (KOS) is a more diffuse social movement composed of thousands of "Resistance Circles" whose membership frequently overlaps with Solidarity. []

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Other underground groups, some of whom claim to be political parties, include the Committee for an Independent Poland (KPN), founded in 1979, and "Independence." KPN is an ultra-nationalistic group that claimed 60,000 members at the height of Solidarity. Its current leaders -- most of whom were recently given stiff prison sentences for fomenting public unrest -- admit the KPN lacks both popular support and material means. Another party, "Independence," is one of the numerous organizations founded around a publication. It rejects Solidarity and has formally allied itself with Fighting Solidarity, with whom it shares radical views. The periodical, according to RFE researchers, has an active readership of more than five thousand. We believe, the movement is little more than a sounding board for ideas. []

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The dozens of remaining organizations that are known in the West run the gamut from the human rights monitoring groups to underground organizations of doctors, lawyers, and teachers. Youth groups are particularly numerous. Western monitors of the underground have recorded at least 30 publications for young people. Many of the groups that have sprung up around these periodicals, we believe, are ad hoc and probably short-lived. The bravado and inexperience of their youthful members have frequently caused them to fall easy prey to the police, judging by [] reports in the press. []

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Underground Publications

Uncensored publications have increased substantially in the last three years. There are five main clandestine publishers of books and periodicals, [redacted] an additional eleven as highly successful in turning out uncensored monographs on contemporary Polish history, politics, philosophy, economics, and literature, and, more recently, audio and videotape cassettes. [redacted] 10,000 people are involved in writing, publishing, and distributing illegal material -- a figure that may also include people involved in a range of other conspiratorial activity. Since the imposition of martial law well over 1,000 periodical titles have appeared and new ones keep appearing despite high attrition. The Minister of the Interior said last month that his men liquidated 1200 printing presses and distribution points, and confiscated 5 million "hostile publications" since 1981 -- clear testimony to both the energy of the police and the printers. [redacted]

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We believe the authorities will never be able to suppress completely the flow of underground literature and have reconciled themselves to its existence, just as they tolerated dissidents in the 1970's. The secret police, according to [redacted] [redacted] the US Embassy, have revealed detailed knowledge of ongoing underground printing activities during interrogations of activists. [redacted] the police do not want to destroy the clandestine print business, only control it. [redacted]

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Strategy and Tactics

Both Lech Walesa and the TTK advocate the restoration of Solidarity and the full implementation of the 1980 Gdansk Accords, but they disagree over how to achieve these goals. The TTK -- especially its recently captured chief, Zbigniew Bujak -- have long advocated work stoppages and anti-regime demonstrations, even though declining participation in such illegal acts is a clear indication that the people are unwilling to risk their jobs or safety. Walesa, who [redacted] [redacted] has a better sense of the public mood than the isolated, clandestine TTK, rejected the strike weapon as unrealistic more than a year ago. He told reporters on the fifth anniversary of the creation of the union that Solidarity did not need millions of demonstrators, but "small wise groups of thinking people" who build concrete programs. [redacted]

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The ultra nationalist KPN, Fighting Solidarity, and the "Independence" political party advocate nothing less than the overthrow of the communist government. Nonetheless, the underground has virtually ruled out sabotage and violence. Walesa and the TTK have always disavowed violence as a tool, arguing that Solidarity was a peaceful protest movement from the beginning. Nonetheless, occasional acts of sabotage and vandalism done in the name of Solidarity are reported in the press [redacted]. These isolated acts, we believe, are not part of a trend toward violence but evidence of the lack of control the underground has over its members. [redacted]

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The tactic of educating the populace is becoming, in our estimation, a goal in itself throughout the underground. Solidarity took the lead in 1982 when it called for the creation of an underground or "parallel society" to break the regime's monopoly on education, publishing, and the media. Solidarity hopes to keep alive the spirit of the union, organize society and make it self sufficient in preparation for the next major political crisis which it believes will force the government to make concessions. Even the radical groups have adopted this tactic, adding to the flood of illegal literature, cassettes, and educational programs. [redacted] argued this year that the formation of a large parallel society would be more effective in pressuring the regime to implement some political changes than the biggest strike. We believe these activities have flourished because they are well suited to the underground's increasingly fragmented organizational structure and the popular reluctance to engage in open anti-regime activity. Producing underground books and organizing lectures on recent Polish

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history does not require direction from a strong central leadership just as, by all accounts, reading the books or attending lectures entails little risk to the interested citizen.

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The Attitude of the Church

Church support has been crucial to the success of the parallel society and other underground activities. The Church has effectively adopted the underground society program as its own through a wide variety of educational, cultural and social welfare programs it took up immediately after martial law when Solidarity was in disarray.

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Effectiveness

By all accounts, publishing and related educational activities are the most successful and effective aspect of the underground's activities. Surveys conducted by the underground

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indicate Poles read "samizdat" and their political thinking is affected by it. In our judgement, the underground's continued ability to break the government's monopoly on education and the media and a heightened level of political sophistication of the Polish populace will make the regime's efforts to make the people forget how they were able to organize and the victories they won during the Solidarity era very difficult.

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The underground, through the educational programs of the parallel society, has also managed to preserve the alliance between the workers and the dissident intellectuals, arguably the most important political achievement of the Solidarity era and

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the one the regime feared the most [redacted]. The spectre of reformed Trotskyite Solidarity advisers lecturing workers on collective bargaining in a Church hall, according to US Consular officers from Western Poland, is clearly unsettling to the regime. [redacted]

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The strike has become less effective as a weapon of political intimidation on a national scale because of the fragmentation of Solidarity and the apathy of the people, but it apparently still has impact at the local level. Underground newspapers are full of unconfirmed reports of brief strikes or job actions in small factories throughout the country which achieve short term goals but which are inevitably followed by punishment of the instigators. [redacted]

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Outlook

We believe that continued regime pressure, organizational problems and the obvious success of underground society educational programs will make Underground Solidarity evolve from a centrally led trade union type organization to a more traditional but very large and widespread dissident movement. As issues such as Chernobyl and Poland's catastrophic environmental and public health problems increasingly come to the fore, the underground leader of the future is less likely to be the shopfloor union organizer than the doctor or university professor. A symbol of this trend is the virtual eclipse of the TKK by the once subservient science and cultural committee, OKNO. [redacted]

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Underground Solidarity, however, in our estimation, will not go the way of other elitist East European dissident movements and break its ties to the workers. With little prospect of dramatic economic improvement for the next decade, worker dissatisfaction will remain high and the underground will have no shortage of adherents or sympathisers. Similarly, despite the paramount interest in education, teams of Solidarity activists will always be poised to exploit an incident of regime oppression -- as they did after the murder of the radical priest, Father Popieluszko in 1984 -- in ways that will benefit their cause through agitation and propaganda. [redacted]

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